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ABSTRACT

This report summarizes a qualitative study that examined girls in six middle schools representing a range of geographic locations and settings as well as the racial and ethnic mix found in schools across the United States. The schools were all involved in educational reform efforts. The report examines how girls negotiate middle school and gauges girls' reactions to gender equity initiatives and school reform efforts. Chapter 1, "New Challenges, New Expectations," describes the study's rationale and methodology. Chapter 2, "How Girls Negotiate School," presents six girls who demonstrate a range of behavioral strategies described as: (1) speaking out; (2) doing school; and (3) crossing borders. Chapter 3, "School Snapshots: Differing Views of Gender," discusses girls' reactions to school reforms and gender equity initiatives at three middle schools. Chapter 4, "Gender Equity and School Reform," examines school location differences in defining gender issues. Chapter 5, "Outcomes and Recommendations," identifies eight outcomes: (1) girls use strategies to form identity and negotiate school; (2) mentors are crucial to girls' developing sense of self; (3) school reform should connect to girls' and boys' adolescent experiences and developmental needs; (4) leadership opportunities bolster girls' competence and increase actual influence in school; (5) suburban schools approach gender issues through explicit policies, urban schools through committed individuals, and rural schools through reforms that address gender issues indirectly; (6) schools must mesh policy, committed individuals, and program reform to make gender equity essential; (7) public dialogue is critical to sustained school change; and (8) research on gender issues can benefit girls in all school settings. Strategies such as detracking, small learning communities, developmentally appropriate approaches, and multicultural and feminist curricula will empower all students.

Contains 7 appendices detailing the research approach and approximately 45 references. (KDFB)

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